

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS:PFOR, SO, US

SUBJECT:WASHINGTON POST STORY ON US-SOMALI RELATIONS

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE ENTITLED "SOMALI GAMBLE TO CUT

STRINGS" BY DUSKO DODER APPEARED IN THE WASHINGTON POST
SUNDAY, JULY 14:

MOGADISHU, SOMALIA-THE SOMALI GOVERNMENT MADE A BOLD
GAMBLE WHEN IT TOOK AMERICAN LEGISLATORS, DEFENSE

SPECIALISTS AND REPORTERS TO A SOVIET-BUILT MILITARY
COMPLEX AT BERBERA, ON THE GULF OF ADEN. THE STAKES WERE
LARGE, SINCE AN ATTEMPT TO INVOLVE THE UNITED STATES
WITHOUT ALIENATING THE SOVIETS IS RISKY.

SENIOR SOMALI OFFICIALS SAY PRIVATELY THAT THE BASIC OBJEC-
TIVE OF THE GOVERNMENT WAS TO DEMONSTRATE TO "EVERYONE"
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THAT SOMALIS ARE MASTERS IN THEIR OWN HOUSE. THE WORD,

EVERYONE" INCLUDES NOT ONLY THE UNITED STATES AND SOMALIA'S NONALIGNED AFRICAN AND ARAB NEIGHBORS, BUT ALSO THE SOVIETS, WHOSE ACTIVITY HERE HAS BEEN INCREASING IN RECENT YEARS.

THE MOST OBVIOUS LESSON OF THE EXERCISE, ACCORDING TO DIPLOMATS HERE, IS THAT PRESIDENT MOHAMED SIAD BARRE IS BY NO MEANS A SOVIET PUPPET. INDEED, MOSCOW IS BELIEVED TO BE UNHAPPY BOTH WITH THE SOMALI LEADER'S DESIRE TO REAFFIRM HIS NEUTRALIST CREDENTIALS AND WITH HIS APPARENT INTENTION TO SCALE DOWN SOMALIA'S HEAVY DEPENDENCE ON THE SOVIET UNION.

STILL MOSCOW'S POSITION AT THE HORN OF AFRICA CANNOT BE EASILY SHAKEN SINCE THE SOVIETS HAVE A HOLD ON THE SOMALI ARMED FORCES, WHICH ARE WHOLLY EQUIPPED WITH SOVIET ARMS, AND HAVE ALLIES IN THE RULING MILITARY COUNCIL. THERE WERE REPORTS HERE THAT SIAD BARRE FACED

SOME OPPOSITION IN THE 20-MEMBER COUNCIL AFTER HE INVITED THE AMERICANS TO INSPECT THE BERBERA COMPLEX. THIS OPPOSITION MAY BECOME STRONGER IF HIS GAMBLE FAILS, DIPLOMATS BELIEVE.

HENCE, WASHINGTON'S REACTION IS LIKELY TO INFLUENCE SOMALIA'S FOREIGN-POLICY COURSE OVER A LONG TERM. AN OUTRIGHT AMERICAN CONDEMNATION OF SOMALIA WOULD ONLY DEEPEN THIS COUNTRY'S ISOLATION FROM ITS ARAB AND AFRICAN ALLIES, ACCORDING TO DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS, AND CONSEQUENTLY STRENGTHEN MOSCOW'S POSITION.

A DRAMATIC CHANGE OF U.S. POLICY IN THIS PART OF AFRICA, HOWEVER, WOULD CREATE PROBLEMS IN WASHINGTON'S RELATIONS WITH ETHIOPIA. THE UNITED STATES HAS HAD A CLOSE MILITARY RELATIONSHIP WITH ETHIOPIA, AND SOMALIA CLAIMS THE ETHIOPIAN-CONTROLLED PROVINCE OF OGADEN, WHOSE POPULATION IS PREDOMINANTLY SOMALI.

SENIOR SOMALI DIPLOMATS HERE HINT THAT SIAD BARRE'S
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DECISION TO INVITE AN AMERICAN INSPECTION OF BERBERA WAS CALCULATED TO PROMOTE CHANGES IN U.S. POLICY. BUT THEY EMPHASIZE THAT SIAD BARRE WAS MOTIVATED BY SOMALIA'S STAGGERING ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND THE NEED FOR CAPITAL TO FINANCE HIS GOVERNMENT'S AMBITIOUS DEVELOPMENT PLANS.

THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF SAID AS MUCH WHEN HE COMMENTED:

-THE MAN WHO IS DROWNING DOES NOT QUESTION THOSE WHO
EXTEND A HELPING HAND. WE ARE DROWNING."

THE SOVIET PRESENCE AT BERBERA, ANOTHER SENIOR GOVERN-
MENT OFFICIAL SAID, IS THE PRICE SOMALIA HAS TO PAY FOR
SOVIET ASSISTANCE.

-HOW COULD WE REFUSE THEIR REQUEST" FOR ESTABLISHING
COMMUNICATION FACILITIES AT BERBERA "WHEN THEY SAID THEY
NEED TO TALK TO THEIR SHIPS?" HE ASKED. ALTHOUGH THE
ECONOMIC ARGUMENT IS UNDOUBTEDLY SOMALIA'S MAIN
PREOCCUPATION, DIPLOMATS SPECULATED THAT SIAD BARRE MAY
ALSO HAVE SOUGHT IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED
STATES IN AN EFFORT TO BETTER SOMALIA'S POSITION WITH
RESPECT TO ETHIOPIA.

THE SOMALIS HAVE BEEN WATCHING DEVELOPMENTS IN ETHIOPIA
CLOSELY SINCE THE MILITARY COUP IN ADDIS ABABA LAST YEAR.
IN THEIR JUDGMENT, THE NEW MILITARY GOVERNMENT IN
ETHIOPIA IS NOT IN CONTROL OF THE COUNTRY, AND INTERNAL
DISPUTES THERE, PARTICULARLY THE ERITREAN SECESSIONIST
MOVEMENT, HAVE RAISED HOPES THAT SOMALIA CAN EVENTUALLY
TAKE CONTROL OF OGADEN. A REDUCTION OF U.S. MILITARY

INVOLVEMENT IN ETHIOPIA WOULD FURTHER SOMALI INTERESTS,
ACCORDING TO THIS LINE OF THINKING.

WHATEVER THE REASONS, THE SOMALIS SEEM GENUINELY
INTERESTED IN IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH WASHINGTON.

MOST OF ALL, WE WANT TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN AMERICA AND
ACCEPTED AS WE ARE," SAID COL. AHMED SULEYMAN, THE PRESI-
DENT'S SON-IN-LAW AND CHIEF OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY
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FORCES.

DESPITE SOME ADVERSE PUBLICITY, THE INITIAL IMPACT OF
SIAD BARRE'S GAMBIT HAS BEEN COMPARATIVELY SUCCESSFUL
FROM THE SOMALI POINT OF VIEW. SENIOR OFFICIALS HAVE
BEEN ENCOURAGED IN PARTICULAR BY THE CONVERSATIONS HERE
OF SEN. DEWEY BARTLETT (R-OKLA.) AND BY HIS PRONOUNCE-
MENTS IN WASHINGTON.

ACCORDINGLY, EVEN MODEST STEPS BY THE UNITED STATES
WOULD STRENGTHEN SIAD BARRE'S POLICY AND CREATE A NEW
BALANCE OF FORCES, ACCORDING TO WESTERN DIPLOMATS.

THIS, IN TURN, WOULD NOT MEAN THE END OF MOSCOW'S ROLE
HERE. THE RUSSIANS ARE CLEARLY GOING TO CONTINUE TO

OPERATE THEIR COMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES AT BERBERA, BUT
IT IS BY NO MEANS CERTAIN THAT THEY WOULD BE ALLOWED TO
USE FACILITIES THERE FOR STORAGE AND HANDLING OF THEIR
MISSILES. END

2. ARTICLE WAS CAPTIONED "NEWS ANALYSIS" AND INCLUDED

PHOTOGRAPH OF TWO SOVIET-BUILT PATROL BOATS AND SOVIET
BARRACKS SHIP AT BERBERA. INGERSOLL

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